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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2016  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6873  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6102  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1355  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001662

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION MONITORING COMMISSION AWOL FOR LOCAL  
ELECTIONS

Classified By: Classified by CDA, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton;  
reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The campaign process for the November 29 local elections is well underway in Algeria, but without the official election monitoring commission that has been present in past elections. Newspaper accounts report both coalition and opposition political party discontent with Interior Minister Zerhouni's comments on the absence of a commission. Conversations with party representatives reinforce concern that the election process lacks transparency and is at risk of tampering and fraud. END SUMMARY.

#### THE BEGINNING OF THE CONTROVERSY

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¶2. (C) On November 8, the first day of the official election campaign, Interior Minister Yazid Zerhouni gave an interview on the French-language radio station in which he stated that "if political parties wish to form (an election monitoring commission) the administration will not oppose it, on the condition that the commission is responsible for its members." (Note: Under Algerian law, election monitoring commissions consist of various party representatives and are formed at the discretion of the president. End note.) A later report in the French-language daily El Watan quoted Zerhouni saying "the commission is about haggling, with members recently asking for 80,000 dinars (\$1,195) per day." Moussa Touati, head of a small opposition party called the Algerian National Front (FNA), told us somewhat surprisingly on November 5 that he agreed with Zerhouni and opposed the monitoring commission because when he went to meet with them, "they were only concerned about how much money they would be paid for their services." Other reaction to Zerhouni's comments was less accepting. Society of Peace Movement (MSP) head Aboujerra Soltani, a member of the ruling presidential coalition, called the election monitoring commission a "necessity," according to French-language daily L'Expression. A November 13 cartoon in the French-language daily Le Soir d'Algerie carried the ironic caption, "The fraud risks being sullied by the vote".

#### THE PARTIES REACT

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¶3. (C) In a November 7 conversation with poloff before Zerhouni's November 8 radio interview, opposition Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) representative Mohamed Khandak,

director of local elections, was generally dour about the prospects for a fair election. Khandak expressed disappointment that an election monitoring commission would not be established. Khandak also derisively described the technical commission charged with carrying out the elections as merely another government tool aimed at controlling the outcome of the election process.

¶4. (C) MSP representatives have used the absence of the monitoring commission to underscore the party's reservations about the transparency of the November 29 local election process. In a November 12 meeting with poloff, Laouar Naamane, president of the MSP's local elections committee, and Abdelkrim Dahman, responsible for external affairs and emigration issues, rejected Zerhouni's notion that the government could not afford a monitoring commission, and countered that since 2005 MSP had called for a commission consisting of unpaid members. Removing a financial incentive to participate increased the independence of the commission's members, they said. They also believed, however, that it was too late to create an effective monitoring commission this year.

¶5. (C) While the opposition RCD and ruling coalition MSP may both pine for a monitoring commission, the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) seems unconcerned by its absence. In a November 13 meeting, FLN campaign director Frikha Amara told poloff that it was up to the political parties to monitor elections. He added that it would not be possible for fraud to take place if party representatives were present at each polling station.

COMMENT: THE FOX IN THE HEN HOUSE

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ALGIERS 00001662 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) The absence of an official election monitoring commission is troubling and reflects an ongoing series of questionable decisions by the Interior Ministry. Zerhouni's comments on the commission came in a radio interview, not in a formal statement, and were vague and broad enough to suggest that, on the one hand, the government was not opposed to a monitoring commission while, on the other hand, it expected the commission to be fully responsible for its members -- including financially. And then there was the timing of the comments. Zerhouni made them on the first day of the election campaign, knowing that parties had been waiting for weeks to learn if the government would form a monitoring commission and that it would be impossible for a meaningful monitoring mechanism to be created so close to the elections. Perhaps less surprising is the FLN's blase reaction to the absence of the commission. With no independent structure in place to monitor the elections, the FLN has nothing to lose and possibly even more to gain.  
DAUGHTON